

## **SPORE: extract**

‘The last logged communication from the town was seventeen hours ago: a 911 call for an ambulance. The caller only managed to say ...’ The major flipped through a pad of paper on his desk. He was all buzz-cut silver hair and lean, tanned face like chiselled sandstone. Marines all the way. *Booyah*. He read what was scribbled down on the page in front of him. ‘*They’re all dead ... everyone’s dead, flesh turned to liquid. It moves ... There are things! Moving things! They’re alive ...*’ Major Platt looked up at the Doctor. ‘The caller became incoherent after that and disconnected shortly after.’

The Doctor drummed his fingers thoughtfully against the top of the aluminium folding-table between them. ‘Hmm ... That really doesn’t sound very good.’

The command tent was an airtight bubble of thick plastic, lit from within by several halogen stand lamps. The major had removed his mask and biohazard suit and now stared at the Doctor curiously. His Edwardian morning jacket, waistcoat and cravat seemed to be particularly drawing the major’s gaze.

‘I was at the opera,’ the Doctor explained, ‘when my phone went off.’

The major waved that aside. ‘It appears the pathogen *isn’t* airborne, but we can’t be a hundred per cent sure of that. We have all entry/exit routes from the town locked down. It appears this thing, whatever it is, infects and kills *very* quickly.’

‘Which is probably a rather good thing.’

Platt’s grey brow furrowed.

‘Quick to kill, major, means we don’t have to worry about an infected carrier straying too far away from the town.’ The Doctor nodded thoughtfully. ‘You said you sent some of your troops in?’

He nodded. ‘Four hours ago. We’ve not heard from them in over three.’

‘What was the last thing you did hear?’

The major shook his head. ‘Garbled transmission. Made no sense to me.’

‘Do tell.’

‘Something about *webs everywhere. Webs all over the town.*’ The major squinted his grey eyes. ‘Webs? Everyone turned to liquid! You got any idea what on earth we’re dealing with?’

The Doctor had a pretty good idea. But it was just that: an idea. A suspicion. He needed to know for sure. ‘You’re right. It’s not an airborne infection, major. At least, not yet.’

‘You telling me you know what this is?’

The Doctor nodded slowly. ‘I’ve come across it before, yes.’

‘You got a name for it?’

‘A nightmare.’ The Doctor thumbed his chin thoughtfully. ‘If it’s the pathogen I think it is, it will spread quickly. There are no species barriers. It can be carried and transmitted by any creature, *anything* organic, in fact.’

‘That’s impossible! No pathogen can do that!’

‘Within seventy hours of touchdown, this thing will become uncontainable. Within a month ...’ The Doctor shook his head slowly. No words needed there.

The major’s eyes narrowed. ‘You sure you’re from the Atlanta Center of Disease Control? Because you sure ain’t like the usual pencil-neck swab-heads down there.’

‘Ahh ... you have me, major,’ the Doctor said with a smile. ‘I lied.’

Major Platt bristled. ‘Then you better tell me right now who sent you.’

‘I’m sure you’ve heard of the organisation, major. Its name gets whispered every now and then in dark government corners.’

‘Who are you with?’

‘UNIT.’

The major’s face paled. ‘UNIT?’